

*HELIOTHIS PELTIGERA* (LEP.: NOCTUIDAE) —  
THE BORDERED STRAW IN DORSET

By MARGARET BROOKS\*

For the last few years, my colleague Stuart Roberts and I have been conducting a survey of the moths of Holt Heath National Nature Reserve, in Dorset. On the evening of July 12th 1986 we were crossing an area of wet heath on the reserve at dusk when Stuart disturbed a moth feeding at bell heather flowers. He captured it, and on examination it proved to be a female *Heliothis peltigera* (bordered straw), in good condition.

The only species of groundsel growing in that vicinity was heath groundsel (*Senecio sylvaticus*), so the following day the moth was placed in a container with some of the heath groundsel. On July 14th she commenced laying, placing the eggs either singly or in pairs, tucked among the buds or on the undersides of the leaves. Eggs were laid over a period of 3 days, and larvae began emerging five days after the eggs were laid.

In view of the difficulties associated with breeding *H. peltigera* in this country, it was decided to maintain most of the larvae in a high temperature. As a control, 12 larvae were kept indoors at temperatures of 18-20°C. The remaining larvae — 18 in number — were kept in a south-west facing conservatory during the day, in a temperature of 24-27°C, and in the kitchen at night, at 21°C. During the first and second instars the larvae fed on the flowers of the groundsel, but subsequently attacked the leaves, demolishing them at a most alarming rate. By August 11th, several of the larvae in the conservatory were in their final instar, and 3 colour forms were present — ground colour light green, ground colour dark green, and ground colour light green with pink dorsal patches. On August 15th one began to wander, and was provided with sterile potting compost as a pupating medium — this was accepted, and the larva disappeared below the surface. At this time the larvae being kept at room temperature were only half grown, and several had died exhibiting symptoms of virus disease. In time all of them perished, while only 5 of the larvae kept at higher temperatures were lost. The pupae were kept at the same high temperatures, and the first moth emerged on September 11th, followed the next day by another. A total of 9 moths emerged — one pupa developed white mould, and 3 died when their contents liquified.

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Early in the week commencing July 20th, a first instar larva escaped from its container and wandered on to some cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*) flowers which were close by, by, having been gathered for the purpose of feeding larvae of another species. It began feeding on the flowers, and was kept indoors in the same room as our 'control' batch. Its growth rate compared very favourably with that of the larvae in the conservatory, and it buried for pupation on August 19th. It was of the light green with pink patches form, and had fed exclusively on the flowers of cross-leaved heath at room temperatures, i.e. 18-20°C. A healthy pupa was produced, and the moth — a perfect female — emerged on September 25th.

Is cross-leaved heath a new pabulum for *H. peltigera* in the U.K.? The flowers would seem to be a healthy diet, as the frass produced is quite dry, in contrast to the very wet frass produced by a diet of heath groundsel leaves.

### References

- Heath et al. *Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*.  
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Pratt, C. The fate of *H. peltigera* D. & S. in Sussex. *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* 93. 137-141.  
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RHAMPHOMYIA BARBATA MCQ. (DIPT.: EMPIDIDAE) AND CANTHARIS FIGURATA MANN. (COL.) IN S. E. LONDON. — On 8th June last, on some marshy ground just east of Shooters Hill, I caught a male of the above very local and usually rare fly by sweeping rank herbage of various kinds in a willow spinney. Though some time was spent at the place, no other was seen. The species is tolerably distinctive in the net by its grey thorax and reddish abdomen, and is remarkable in the male sex from its peculiar hind-leg characters. The records of *R. barbata* appear to be scattered and not numerous; for N. W. Kent, Collin (1961, *Brit. Flies* 6(2): 372) gives Dartford (Yerbury) and Thames Marshes (H. W. Andrews).

At the same time and place I swept two males and a female of the soldier-beetle *Cantharis figurata* Mann., all within a very limited area. This is not a common species, as Fowler remarks in the VCH list for Kent (1909:155) in recording it from Chattenden and Snodland — both places much farther east in the county. I have always found it very local and somewhat scarce; like the previous insect, it is probably new to the London Suburbs. — A. A. ALLEN.